

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 10, 2016

Agenda Item: Gordon Cattle Conservation Easement (R6)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Min

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Background

FWP purchased a 15,157-acre conservation easement from Gordon Cattle Company (GCC) in Blaine county in 2003. Unbeknownst to either party, a parcel of about 103 acres owned by GCC was not identified or included in the easement. FWP proposes to add this parcel to the existing conservation easement. The parcel is located 13 miles northeast of Chinook and is adjacent (separated by a county road) to the 15-Mile Creek Unit, one of two units conserved by the conservation easement. The parcel comprises silver sagebrush mixed grass prairie and includes about 0.7 miles of 15-Mile Creek. A primary function of the original conservation easement was to protect large blocks of intact wetland and grassland habitats from conversion to croplands. The 103-acre parcel faces a similar threat, particularly if it were sold. Consistent with the easement lands, this parcel provides high value habitat for breeding waterfowl and grassland birds and year-round habitat for mule deer and pronghorn. Species of conservation need documented in the area include Sprague's pipit, McCown's longspur, swift fox, and greater sage-grouse.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

No official public involvement has taken place. Upon endorsement by the Commission, FWP would conduct an environmental analysis and see public comment on the proposal.

Alternatives and Analysis

Proceeding with the proposal would expand the acreage of conserved habitats, maintaining a large block of intact habitat. If the decision were made to not pursue these additional acres, they would remain susceptible to cropland conversion, which continues to occur, particularly in this part of the state.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission endorse this proposal, allowing the department to conduct due diligence, further negotiations, and MEPA analysis. If completed, this proposal would expand conservation of high priority habitats, enhancing the department's current conservation easement interests in the area.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission endorse this proposal to incorporate a parcel into the Gordon Cattle Conservation Easement as described, allowing FWP to continue negotiations and to conduct analysis and associated public review.